

# Reports, forum

---

*The Person and the Challenges*  
Volume 9 (2019) Number 1, p. 239–248  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15633/pch.3372>

---

Agnieszka Lekka-Kowalik

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4834-318X>

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

Tomasz Górka

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4743-9585>

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

## **“Obviously there exists an organic connection between independence and university, and between independence and *catholicity*”**

John Paul II received his honorary doctorate from the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL) on June 17, 1983. The KUL Senate unanimously adopted a resolution on granting Him a doctorate *honoris causa* on January 20, 1983. In a letter dated March 21 Rev. Prof. Mieczysław Krąpiec, the then Rector of KUL informed John Paul II about the Senate’s resolution, asking him to accept the honorary degree. The Senate’s resolution was exceptional under two respects. First, it approved the resolutions of individual faculties. At that moment these were: the Faculty of Theology, the Faculty of Christian Philosophy, the Faculty of Canon Law, the Faculty of the Humanities and the Faculty of Social Sciences. So it was the title of doctor *honoris causa* in all disciplines represented by the University.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Uchwała Senatu Akademickiego KUL 20 I 1983 r.*, [The resolution of the Academic Senate of January 20, 1983], in: M. Filipiak, A. Szostek (eds), *Obecność. Karol Wojtyła – Jan Paweł II w Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim: Dar i odpowiedzialność* [The Presence. Karol

Secondly, as a rule KUL does not grant the *honoris causa* doctorate to its own professors – and Rev. Karol Wojtyła taught at KUL for 24 years.<sup>2</sup>

On request of the Faculty Council and the then Dean of the Faculty of Christian Philosophy, Prof. Jerzy Kalinowski, KUL employed Rev. Dr Hab. Karol Wojtyła and he commenced his work in 1954 with contracted lectures on philosophical ethics. The number of lectures and seminars increased, and in 1956 Rev. Karol Wojtyła became a full-time employee of KUL as a professor and the Head of the Department of Ethics. In 1958 Pope Pius XII made Rev. Prof. Karol Wojtyła a bishop in Kraków, so His teaching activities were naturally restricted. From the academic year 1960/61 Rev. Prof. Wojtyła became part-time employed – and remained employed, even when, in 1967, he was appointed a cardinal by Pope Paul VI; he also continued to be the Head of the Department of Ethics until 1978, when he was elected Pope.<sup>3</sup> On December 10, 1976, at the request of the Council of the Faculty of Christian Philosophy and following the Statute, the Academic Senate passed a resolution on giving Cardinal Karol Wojtyła the title of honorary professor of the Catholic University of Lublin. In March 1977 Rector Krąpiec sent a letter to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education with a request for the approval of the Senate's resolution. The answer did not come, and after October 16, 1978 no one was even awaiting it. Wojtyła's research activities were equally intensive. Apart from his other works, in KUL alone he published 1 book, 23 articles and 3 book reviews.<sup>4</sup>

Two things about Rev. Wojtyła's work at KUL deserve to be noted. First, as a bishop and cardinal Rev. Wojtyła donated his university salary to a scholarship fund; and the last one was – as Rev. Andrzej Szostek who was responsible for distribution of that fund noted – a “papal scholarship”, for Rev. Karol Wojtyła was still on the salary list in October 1978. Moreover, the formal employment contract with Karol Wojtyła has never been terminated. As the Rector Krąpiec

---

*Wojtyła–John Paul II at the Catholic University of Lublin: The Gift and the Responsibility*], TNKUL, Lublin 2008, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Franciszek Ziejka claims that the KUL Senate also broke an academic tradition to ask Senates of two other universities for an opinion before awarding anybody with an honorary doctorate. See F. Ziejka, *Jan Paweł II i polski świat akademicki [John Paul II and the Polish academic world]*, Universitas, Kraków 2014, p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> He was replaced by his pupil and friend Prof. Tadeusz Styczeń SDS.

<sup>4</sup> Details of his research and teaching activities at KUL see *Obecność*, op. cit, p. 71-93.



fot. Janusz Kolasa

commented, "I will not dismiss Holy Father."<sup>5</sup> Secondly, even if – because of His ever increasing pastoral duties – he came to KUL less and less often, most of the works which he supervised were completed after he became a bishop: 9 of 11 MA theses and 6 PhD dissertations; he participated as a reviewer in 3 habilitation procedures.<sup>6</sup> Also he used to invite students to Kraków for seminars which took place in the Bishop's Palace at 3, Kanoniczna Street.<sup>7</sup>

On October 16, 1978 students spontaneously created a banner with the inscription "*Nasz Profesor – Papieżem*" which means: „Our Professor has become Pope” and placed it above the main entrance to the university building. The banner remained a few weeks on the building. On October 19, 1978 there was an extraordinary solemn meeting of the Senate which made two resolutions: to mint a special medal commemorating the election of a KUL professor to become Pope, and to present the Pope as the first person with a special medal “For

---

<sup>5</sup> A. Szostek, *Dzieliłem myślę Karola Wojtyły*, <https://www.dziennikwschodni.pl/lublin/dzieliłem-pensje-karola-wojtyly,n,1000028304.html> (1.05.2019).

<sup>6</sup> See *Obecność*, op. cit., p. 76-77.

<sup>7</sup> A. Szostek, *Karol Wojtyła – Jan Paweł II a Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski*, [*Karol Wojtyła – John Paul II and the Catholic University of Lublin*], in: *Obecność*, op. cit., p. 51-52.

Merits for the Catholic University of Lublin”. John Paul II received that Medal on October 23, 1978 during the meeting with Polonia in the Paul VI aula in Vatican. On 25 June 1982 by the decision of the Senate The John Paul II Institute was founded at KUL. It was intended as an interdepartmental research and didactic unit dedicated to the study of the thought of John Paul II, and of current intellectual and social problems approached interdisciplinarily, as well as to build the community of persons in the spirit of Christ’s teaching as preached by John Paul II. The Institute still exists and pursues its aims by holding seminars and conferences, as well as publishing works.<sup>8</sup> A monument of John Paul II and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński was placed in the university courtyard a year later. The monument, designed by Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, refers to a famous scene from a meeting with Polonia on October 23, 1978, when Card. Wyszyński is trying to kneel before the Holy Father, but John Paul II comes off the papal throne and Himself kneels even quicker.<sup>9</sup>

When the initial information about John Paul II’s visit in Poland in 1983 was released, the KUL community was certain that the Pope would visit His *Alma Mater*. The KUL authorities established a committee for preparing a program, of which two main points should be: unveiling of the monument and awarding the Pope an honorary doctorate. On April 6, 1983 the Rector, Rev. Mieczysław Krąpiec received a letter from the state secretariat of Vatican (signed by Abp E. Martinez) which informed that the Holy Father is ready to visit KUL during His pilgrimage. There was an exchange of letters between the Rector and authorities of the Church and of the State, but finally Lublin did not appear on a pilgrimage plan. In a letter of March 24, 1983 to John Paul II, the Rector expressed the KUL’s community disappointment and suggested a possibility of a 2-hour visit.<sup>10</sup> Yet, the communist authorities did not agree to the visit, even the shortest one – the reasons for that must still be discovered. Thus, the ceremony of unveiling the monument took place at KUL on May 30, 1983, and

---

<sup>8</sup> Since October 1, 2010 The Institute is a part of the Faculty of Philosophy.

<sup>9</sup> The sculpture is based on a photo made by Arturo Mari. See also <https://www.dziennikwschodni.pl/magazyn/kolega-papiez-rozmowa-z-norbertem-wojciechowskim,n,1000129533.html> (30.04.2019).

<sup>10</sup> The then first secretary of the Lublin Voivodship Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, Wiesław Skrzydło, a professor the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, suggested that the Pope can come with a helicopter and land on the “Lublinianka” stadium which is very close to KUL. Rev. Krąpiec explained that proposal in a letter to the then Polish Primate, Cardinal Joseph Glemp. See *Obecność*, op. cit., 134-139.

a ceremony of presenting the Pope with an honorary doctorate diploma took place in The Primate's Palace in Warsaw on June 17.

The 50-people delegation from the Catholic University of Lublin went to Warsaw. It consisted of the Rector and Senate, the Great Chancellor Abp Bolesław Pylak, a former Rector Rev. Prof. Marian Rechowicz, the newly elected Rector Bp Piotr Hemperek, Prof. Jan Czerkowski (vicerector), as well as representatives of the Faculties, of the university administration and of students, and also Prof. Jerzy Januszewski, the sculptor of the monument and Prof. Stefan Swieżawski, a friend, a reviewer of Rev. Dr Wojtyła's habilitation and *spiritus movens* of employing him at KUL.<sup>11</sup> In the ceremony there also took part representatives of Polish scholars, among them Prof. Aleksander Gieysztor, the then president of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and rectors: Prof. Józef A. Gierowski (Jagiellonian University), Rev. Prof. Remigiusz Sobański (the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw<sup>12</sup>), Rev. Prof. Marian Jaworski (the Pontifical Theological Academy in Krakow); there were also present representatives of the Friends of KUL Society from Canada and Great Britain.

The ceremony started with a short laudation delivered by the KUL Rector, Rev. Mieczysław A. Krąpiec. He stressed that the University is bound to the Holy Father not only by the fact that He was there a professor for more than twenty years, but also – and more importantly – by the fact that KUL serves the truth about the human being whose value and dignity John Paul II proclaims to the whole world and defends fearlessly against dangerous deformities. In the world in which human beings are threatened even in their existence, and in which science and ideology try to instrumentalize human beings and use them for purposes contrary to their vocation as persons “the teaching and attitude of Your Holiness – Krąpiec declares – is for us all the light directing to the right path, and the support for mind and heart, and the strength to be faithful to the human being redeemed by Christ, and thereby be faithful to God himself, our

---

<sup>11</sup> J. Cieszkowski, „...*Bardzo pragnęłam – i nadal pragnę – znaleźć się w Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim...*” [“... *I really desired – and I continue to desire – to be in the Catholic University of Lublin...*”], „Biuletyn Informacyjny Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego” nr 1/2 (23/24) (1983), p. 108-114.

<sup>12</sup> The Academy of Catholic Theology (ATK) was established in 1954 by merging two faculties of Theology removed by the communist government from the University of Warsaw and from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. In the Theology Faculty of UJ, Rev. Dr Karol Wojtyła received his habilitation (1953) and worked, teaching social ethics. On October 1, 1999 ATK had been transformed into the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw.

Creator and Redeemer.”<sup>13</sup> The integral truth about the human being which constitutes the foundation and the basis of the Christian culture – Krąpiec continued – is a programmatic subject of studies and research undertaken at the Catholic University of Lublin. Thanks to this, KUL serves the Church in Poland, and through it also the universal Church in its mission of evangelization; and the core truth about the human being is: Christ is the only way to meet personal aspirations and build a civilization of love. The founding idea of the Catholic University of Lublin is captured by its motto *Deo et Patriae* (For God and Homeland). Krąpiec then stressed that the research and teaching profile of the University is in harmony with John Paul II’s teaching, expressed in the encyclicals, letters, addresses, prayers and homilies. Thus, Rev. Krąpiec’s speech implicitly justified the resolution of the Senate that John Paul II should receive the honorary doctorate in all disciplines cultivated at KUL. The Rector also spoke about the erection of the monument at the KUL’s courtyard and creating a special institution, the John Paul II Institute. He then read the diploma of *honoris causa* doctorate which was – as it is a tradition at KUL – in Latin and signed (given names were also in Latin) by the then Great Chancellor Abp Bolesław Pylak, the Rector and vice-rectors: Prof. Stefan Sawicki and Rev. Prof. Henryk Wojtyska, and the Senate: Ryszard Bender, Rev. Stanisław Kamiński, Rev. Józef Krukowski, Rev. Jan Szłaga, Jan Turowski, Jan Czerkawski, Rev. Jan Śrutwa, Antoni Stępień, Grzegorz Strojnowski and Jan Żiółek.

John Paul II’s address started with the sentences implicitly confirming that it was the communist authorities of The People’s Republic of Poland who prevented Him from visiting KUL, and that KUL is close to His heart: “Thank you for your visit to Warsaw, as my visit in Lublin could not have happened. I would like to assure you, once again, that I really desired – and I continue to desire – to be in the Catholic University of Lublin, which for a number of years was my work bench. I owe much to the work at your University and I value it highly.”<sup>14</sup> He stressed that catholic universities are a constitutive part of the Church’s mission but also – referring to the year 1918 when Poland regained

---

<sup>13</sup> *Przemówienie rektora ojca prof. Mieczysława A. Krąpca podczas uroczystości wręczenie Ojcu Świętemu doktoratu honoris causa KUL [Speech of the Rector, Rev. Prof. Mieczysław A. Krąpiec during the ceremony of awarding the Holy Father the honorary doctorate of the Catholic University of Lublin]*, in: *Obecność*, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>14</sup> *Przemówienie Ojca Świętego do Przedstawicieli Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego [The Holy Father’s speech to the representatives of the Catholic University of Lublin]*, w: *Obecność*, op. cit., p. 142.

independence and KUL was established – that there exists an organic connection between independence and university as well as between independence and “catholicity”. John Paul II remarked, also, that accepting an honorary doctorate does not belong to a tradition of the papal office, but he already once “yielded” and accepted the *Honoris Causa* Doctorate conferred on Him by all Faculties of the University of Coimbra,<sup>15</sup> the more is He ready to accept the honorary doctorate from KUL. The Pope meant that acceptance as an expression of respect and love with which He cherished both the scholarly activities as such and for the Catholic University of Lublin. He then addressed His wishes to the KUL community: “I wish that KUL will provide an authentic environment for the scientific and educational work in accordance with the best traditions of Polish, European and world university culture. I wish it to be a living community of professors and students, united by a deep love for truth, and simultaneously deeply rooted in the Christian – and at the same time truly humanist – order of values. I wish that our Catholic University will give wise and brave people to the Polish land.”<sup>16</sup> Being on his way to Częstochowa, He promised to entrust “the Catholic Alma Mater from Lublin and all that it does for the future of the Church, the nation and its culture” to Holy Mary, and to give as a votive offering the academic distinction just received.

The KUL delegation prepared several special presents: a bronze miniature of the monument standing at the KUL courtyard, a bibliophilic edition of Wojtyła’s poem *Thinking Homeland*, an album with photos from the ceremony of unveiling of the monument, and a special medal embossed on this occasion. Yet, it was the Pope who was first to offer gifts to the members of the KUL delegation: a medal with the image of Holy Mary with inscription *Regina Poloniae* and the book *Be not afraid: André Frossard in conversation with Pope John Paul II*. If we recall that John Paul II’s visit took place during the period of the Martial law<sup>17</sup>, it is obvious that both: reminding that Poland has the Queen who never abandons Her children, and the call *Be not afraid* were taken with gratitude as supporting and invigorative. All members of the delegation had a chance to be presented to the Pope; and many of them He remembered. For

---

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II received it on May 15, 1982.

<sup>16</sup> *Przemówienie Ojca Świętego... [The Holy Father’s speech...]*, p. 143.

<sup>17</sup> The Martial law was introduced on December 13, 1981 by General Wojciech Jaruzelski and lifted on July 22, 1983.

each person John Paul II had few warm-hearted words. The meeting, planned for about an hour, was prolonged by 25 min.

Wisdom and fortitude, knowledge and understanding belong to the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Pope's wishes have been taken as tasks to be fulfilled by KUL in all its activities. John Paul II was able to visit KUL only on June 9, 1987, during His third pilgrimage to Poland. It was part of a visit to Lublin, which was the station of the Second National Eucharistic Congress. He first met with representatives of the Polish academic world in the KUL aula, and then with the community of the Catholic University of Lublin in the courtyard, where the Liturgy of the Word took place. In His homily the Holy Father emphasized that universities, by their very name, proclaim that the whole reality is revealed to the human being from the point of view of truth, and by knowing the truth about reality, about the Creator and about creation, the human being pays her „debt” to the truth, and at the same time realizes herself. The university with an adjective “catholic” participates – like any other university – in the responsibility for truth while practicing research and transmitting its results; but the adjective indicates that all cognitive and didactic effort is organically related to God's Revelation. The attractiveness of the Catholic University, He claimed, is connected with the hope that this university is a place not only of „scientific truth”, but also of „the truth of life”. He concluded His speech with a much quoted call: “University! [...] Serve the Truth! If you serve the Truth – you serve Freedom. And liberation of man and the Nation. You serve Life!”.<sup>18</sup> These words are included into the Statute of KUL in the description of its mission. The Pope also blessed the foundation stone for the construction of a building which was to bear the name: *Collegium Ioannis Pauli II*.

---

<sup>18</sup> See Jan Paweł II, *W służbie prawdy. Przemówienie Ojca Świętego do społeczności Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego*, [In the service of truth. The Holy Father's speech to the community of the Catholic University of Lublin], in: *Obecność*, op. cit., p. 163. He added beyond the official text: “I will leave you at least one very personal thought. One could say – almost from a book of friendship [...]. I came to the Catholic University of Lublin today to experience rejuvenation here, to rejuvenate the spirit. It is from a book of friendship to a book of friendship, from the book of friendship of the Pope, whom I do not write, to the book of friendship of the Catholic University of Lublin, which you can write down”, see [http://www.kul.pl/w-sluzbie-prawdy,art\\_31153.html](http://www.kul.pl/w-sluzbie-prawdy,art_31153.html) (30.04.2019). Such a book of friendship appeared in 2003: *Ze sztambucha do sztambucha „Ale Jego duch jest z nami”* [From the book of friendship to the book of friendship: „But His spirit is with us”], prepared by A. Smreczyńska-Gąbka, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2003 (2. edition enlarged in 2006).



John Paul II reconfirmed the role of KUL in contemporary Poland and the world in His letter of June 29, 1992 addressed to Abp Bolesław Pylak on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the University: "We celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Catholic University of Lublin in our free and sovereign Homeland. An extremely profound and difficult process of social, economic, political and cultural transformation is underway. It is accompanied by acute crises which put at great risk the achievements made so far. In this new situation, the role of the Catholic University is not only not diminishing, but is growing. [...] Here is the great task of the Catholic University for today: to form people rich not only in reliable knowledge, but above all in authentic wisdom, able to solve the problems of today's Poland, without forgetting the highest, that is, God's Truth. Contrary to appearances, the great dispute over man continues and has not ended with the fall of Marxist ideology. In a sense, this dispute has become even more vivid, since today the methods of degradation of the human person and of the value of human life have become more subtle and therefore more dangerous. Hence the need for great vigilance for human being. Here too, the Catholic University of Lublin has a significant role to play. It consists in forming human consciences and making them aware of fundamental values such as life, goodness, freedom, truth, love, justice and human solidarity."<sup>19</sup>

After the death of John Paul II, the Academic Senate, at its extraordinary meeting on April 4, 2005, as a tribute to the great son of Poland and KUL professor, adopted a resolution on giving the University the name of John Paul II. The Congregation for Catholic Education by decision of July 25, 2005 approved the resolution. The new name: the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, was officially announced on 16 October 2005 at the inauguration of the academic year.

## Bibliography

Cieszkowski J., „...*Bardzo pragnęłam – i nadal pragnę – znaleźć się w Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim...*” [... "I really desired – and I continue to desire – to be in the Catholic University of Lublin..."], „Biuletyn Informacyjny Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego” nr 1/2 (23/24) (1983), p. 108-114.

Filipiak M., Szostek A. (eds), *Obecność. Karol Wojtyła – Jan Paweł II w Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim: Dar i odpowiedzialność* [*The Presence. Karol Wojtyła-*

---

<sup>19</sup> *Jubileusz 75-lecia KUL. Przesłanie Jana Pawła II* [*The 75th anniversary of the Catholic University of Lublin. Message from John Paul II*] in: *Obecność*, op. cit., p. 167.

- John Paul II at the Catholic University of Lublin: The Gift and the Responsibility*, TNKUL, Lublin 2008.
- Jan Paweł II, *Jubileusz 75-lecia KUL. Przesłanie Jana Pawła II [The 75th anniversary of the Catholic University of Lublin. Message from John Paul II]*, in: M. Filipiak, A. Szostek, A. (eds), *Obecność. Karol Wojtyła – Jan Paweł II w Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim: Dar i odpowiedzialność*, TNKUL, Lublin 2008, p. 165-168.
- Jan Paweł II, *W służbie prawdy [In the service of truth. The Holy Father's speech to the community of the Catholic University of Lublin]*, in: M. Filipiak, A. Szostek (eds), *Obecność. Karol Wojtyła – Jan Paweł II w Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim: Dar i odpowiedzialność*, TNKUL, Lublin 2008, 158-164.
- Krąpiec M., *Przemówienie rektora ojca prof. Mieczysława A. Krąpca podczas uroczystości wręczenie Ojcu Świętemu doktoratu honoris causa KUL [Speech of the Rector, Rev. Prof. Mieczysław A. Krąpiec during the ceremony of awarding the Holy Father the honorary doctorate of the Catholic University of Lublin]*, in: M. Filipiak, A. Szostek (eds), *Obecność. Karol Wojtyła – Jan Paweł II w Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim: Dar i odpowiedzialność*, TNKUL, Lublin 2008, 140-141.
- Szostek A., *Karol Wojtyła – Jan Paweł II a Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, [Karol Wojtyła–John Paul II and the Catholic University of Lublin]*, in: M. Filipiak, A. Szostek, (eds), *Obecność. Karol Wojtyła – Jan Paweł II w Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim. Dar i odpowiedzialność*, TNKUL, Lublin 2008, p. 49-62.
- Uchwała Senatu Akademickiego KUL 20 I 1983 r., [The resolution of the Academic Senate of January 20, 1983]*, in: M. Filipiak, A. Szostek (eds), *Obecność. Karol Wojtyła – Jan Paweł II w Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim. Dar i odpowiedzialność*, TNKUL, Lublin 2008, p. 134.
- Ze sztambucha do sztambucha: „Ale Jego duch jest z nami” [From the book of friendship to the book of friendship: „But His spirit is with us”]*, prepared by A. Smreczyńska-Gąbka, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2003.
- Ziejka F., *Jan Paweł II i polski świat akademicki [John Paul II and the Polish academic world]*, Universitas, Kraków 2014.

## Netography

- Jan Paweł II, *W służbie prawdy [In the service of truth]*, [http://www.kul.pl/w-sluzbie-prawdy,art\\_31153.html](http://www.kul.pl/w-sluzbie-prawdy,art_31153.html) (30.04.2019).
- Szostek A., *Dzieliłem pensję Karola Wojtyły (I distributed the salary of Karol Wojtyła)*, <https://www.dziennikwschodni.pl/lublin/dzielilem-pensje-karola-wojtyly,n,1000028304.html> (1.05.2019).
- Żurawski B., *Kolega papież: Rozmowa z Norbertem Wojciechowskim [Colleague Pope: Interview with Norbert Wojciechowski]*, (<https://www.dziennikwschodni.pl/magazyn/kolega-papiez-rozmowa-z-norbertem-wojciechowskim,n,1000129533.html>) (30.04.2019).